

In recent decades, historians have increasingly questioned center–periphery models that cast “borderlands” as passive, reactive zones shaped only by imperial expansion. This shift is part of several broader trends in scholarship, including the rise of global and connected histories, comparative imperial studies, and, more recently, calls to decolonize Russian and Eurasian studies, all of which seek to highlight the agency of local actors, communities, and intellectual traditions. Though our conference is certainly in dialogue with these newer approaches our aim is somewhat different: to emphasize the internal vibrancy and generative power of the Caucasus itself throughout early modern and modern era.

The Caucasus has long been imagined as a marginal zone, sandwiched between larger powers such as Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and Persia. Yet this perspective risks overlooking the region’s remarkable vibrancy and its formative role in shaping the very structures and policies of those empires. Defined by its striking geography — from the Black Sea to the Caspian littoral, from high mountain ranges to lowlands and steppe frontiers — the Caucasus has furthermore long been a meeting place of languages, religions, and cultures. This diversity fostered distinctive political and social forms, and created conditions in which local initiatives could resonate beyond the region itself. Local traditions of governance and law, religious and intellectual movements, and practices of resistance and accommodation all had consequences that radiated inward and outward, affecting as such imperial policy and cross-regional dynamics. By stressing on these processes, we aim to reestablish the Caucasus as a space of initiative, not just response.

CONVENOR

The event is jointly organized by the research projects: NextGenerationEU through the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Slovakia under the project No. 09I03-03-V04-00236. Between Europe and Asia. The Role of Dagestan in the Russian-Safavid Diplomatic and Trade Relations (16th and 17th Centuries) (Department of General History, Comenius University in Bratislava) and the FWF Project Central Asia in the Russian Diplomatic Archive (Institute of Iranian Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences).

CONCEPT

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International symposium

Center in Motion

The Caucasus Beyond Peripheries



MAY 28–29, 2026

**Faculty of Arts
Comenius University in Bratislava
Gondova 2
81102 Bratislava
Slovakia**

Programme

Archaeological Library (Room G5)
Gondova Street 2

THURSDAY, 28 MAY

10.00 – 10:30	Welcome and Introduction
10:30 – 12:15	Panel I: Politics in Motion from the Caucasus Chair: Florian Schwarz Vienna Selim Güngörürler Istanbul <i>Dagestan's Shift from Safavid to Ottoman Orbit after Mid-Seventeenth Century and the Kuban-Dagestan Line as Casus Belli for the Habsburg-Russian vs. Ottoman War in 1735-1736</i> Natalia Królikowska Warsaw <i>The Circassians' Responses to the Fading Power of the Crimean Khanate (1739–1756)</i> Sean Pollock Dayton, Ohio <i>Centering Circassia in Kabardian Correspondence to the White Tsar</i>
12:15 – 13:30	LUNCH
13:30 – 15:15	Panel II: Polycentric Worlds: Authority and Knowledge In and Beyond the Caucasus Chair: Giorgio Rota Vienna Lukáš Rybár Bratislava <i>When the Periphery Mattered: Dagestan and Russian-Safavid Connectedness in the Seventeenth Century</i> Petra Košťálová Prague (online) <i>Shaping Entangled History of Central Europe through Armenian Sources</i> Murat Yaşar Oswego, New York (online) <i>Borderland as Catalyst: The North Caucasus and the Remaking of Ottoman and Muscovite Imperial Strategy, 1550–1600</i>
15:15 – 15:35	COFFEE

15:35 – 16:35	Book Launch and Discussion Chair: Thomas Welsford London Shamil Shikhaliev, <i>Portrait of a Soviet Islamicist. Muhammad-Said Saidov (1902–1985)</i> . (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2026) Discussants: Naira Sahakyan Erevan & Mansur Gazimzianov Amsterdam
16:35 – 18:15	Free Time
18:15	KEYNOTE (Room G239) Paolo Sartori Vienna <i>Sense of Place: A Village in Soviet Daghestan Seen Through a Mosque Library</i>
20:00	Conference Dinner
FRIDAY, 29 MAY	
10:00 – 10:40	Archival Session Weronika Zmiejewski Berlin <i>Listening to the Caucasus: WWII Recordings, Memory, and the Archive</i>
10:40 – 11:00	COFFEE BREAK
11:00 – 13:00	Panel III: Intellectual Lives in Motion Between Worlds and Words Chair: Matej Ivančík Bratislava Thomas Welsford London <i>Arshak Muradian and the Art of Hiding in Plain Sight</i> Shamil Shikhaliev Vienna <i>From Periphery to Centre: the Caucasus and the Formation of the Khalwatiyya as a Transregional Sufi Brotherhood</i> Giorgio Rota Vienna <i>Hindenburg's Officer': Some Notes on Herbert Volck's Caucasian Trilogy</i>
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH
14:00 – 16:30	Optional Walking Tour of Historic Bratislava and the Castle